Life After Death—Part 5

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What about reincarnation experiences and the Near-Death Experience?

In their own unique way, near-death experiences (NDEs) may lead to an openness towards the pagan doctrine of reincarnation and sympathy toward Eastern religions in general.[1] Kenneth Ring comments that "NDErs do appear to be more inclined to a reincarnational perspective following their experience and, not surprisingly, appear to be more sympathetic to Eastern religions as well. Furthermore, my findings seem to be consistent with the data of other researchers."[2] For example, the characteristic "review" of one's life is sometimes transformed into a review of one's alleged *past* lives.[3] This NDE association with reincarnation is also one more parallel to ancient mystery religion. Of course, mediumism and spirit guides in general tend to encourage a belief in reincarnation, which is a common occult philosophy. But along with many other researchers we are convinced that the most logical explanation for reincarnation experiences can be found in demonic deception, not in the existence of multiple lifetimes.[4]

What is the NDE view of God?

The NDE generates a firm conviction concerning the existence of God. But, whatever else it may be, the "God" experienced by NDErs is not the biblical God. Many NDErs think they have encountered the biblical God or Jesus. Unfortunately, this appears to be a misperception based on people's spiritual expectations from a nominal exposure to Christian belief.

First, this God is not necessarily personal. The NDE God is described in terms such as the following: "An undeniable omnipresent *force.*" "It is *not* a person, but it is a being of some kind. It is a massive energy."[5]

Second, this God seems to be indifferent to evil. For example, one NDEr relates, "I remember I knew that everything, everywhere in the universe was okay, that the plan was perfect. That whatever was happening—the wars, famine, whatever—was okay. Everything was perfect. Somehow it was all a part of the perfection, that we didn't have to be concerned about it at all."[6] This, too, is in harmony with the philosophy of the East and the occult.

Third, God may also be perceived in pantheistic terms so that "God is all, all is God." Another NDEr's comment typifies this: "I seem to have greater awareness of all living things and that we are all a part of one another and ultimately a part of a greater consciousness, God."[7] A former atheist concludes that now, "I know that there is a God. And that God is everything that exists, [that's] the essence of God.... Everything that exists has the essence of God within it. I *know* there's a God now. I have no question."[8] And, "I think of God as a tremendous source of energy.... We are [all] God."[9]

Finally, after the NDE, God is often seen as the originator of all religions, and NDErs may find they desire a universal religion that embraces all humanity.[10] The conclusion is: "No matter what religion you are in, of the five major religions... you are still worshiping the one God, no matter what you call it: Allah, God, Jesus, or whoever."[11]

All this reveals that the "God" that many NDErs encounter is not the biblical God.[12]

Are all NDEs positive experiences—or are many hellish?

All NDEs are not positive. But researchers such as Raymond Moody, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Kenneth Ring and others—who often accept an occult view of life and death—seem to rarely encounter people with negative experiences. According to Dr. Moody, far fewer than 1.0 % of people experience hellish NDEs (0.3 %). This figure is based on several thousand NDEs involving the research of Drs. Moody, and Ring, and the Evergreen Study.[13] Therefore, these researchers would have us think that, for almost everyone, life after death is entirely a heavenly affair.

Nevertheless, other researchers report some far different NDEs from those that entail universal bliss. One leading researcher, Dr. Charles Garfield, recalls, "Not everyone dies a blissful, accepting death.... Almost as many of the dying patients I interviewed reported negative visions (encounters with demonic figures and so forth) as reported blissful experiences, while some reported both."[14]

Hellish experiences are also reported by Dr. Maurice Rawlings M.D., in *Beyond Death's Door* (1978), and in *To Hell and Back* (1996). Rawlings also suggests that positive and negative experiences occur in a roughly 50-50 ratio. He discovered that the positive experiences are easily remembered because they are so blissful. But the negative experiences are so hellish they are repressed deeply enough so that they are not remembered at all.

We should remind the reader that, as in the case of occult astral projection or soul travel, the NDE appears to be nothing more than an experience wherein one is temporarily suspended outside the body in another dimension. It is not an experience with true or irreversible death. So, it is not an experience of death as defined biblically—it is neither heaven nor hell. Thus, we do not believe that the vast majority of cases can properly be described as experiences of the biblical afterlife. In other words, it is a mistake to interpret these experiences as "visits" to either heaven or hell. They are mystical experiences that the spirits would like us to think are accurate representations of heaven or hell. Thus, the NDE "heaven" is accessible to anyone irrespective of his religious belief, and the NDE "hell"—as in cross-cultural traditions—is at best only a temporary place for the purging of sins and is not eternal. However, in neither case is the depiction true to biblical teaching. (Although this is not to say there are no cases where the biblical heaven or hell might have been experienced.)

In conclusion, the bias of some NDE researchers not withstanding,[15] we stress the importance of a critical approach to NDEs. We should not be so gullible as to accept the claim that all NDEs are blissful. Likewise, neither should we assume that such experiences—whether heavenly or hellish—are accurate descriptions of the biblical afterlife.

Notes:

[1] Kenneth Ring, *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), pp. 145-146.
[2] Ibid., p. 158.
[3] Ibid., p. 160.
[4] Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* pp. 374-377; John Weldon, *Reincarnation,* unpublished

ms., passim; Robert Morey, *Reincarnation and Christianity,* p. 30; Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation,* pp. 78-82; John Snyder, *Reincarnation Vs. Resurrection,* pp. 88-90; Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Appraisal,* p. 71.

[5] Ring, *Heading,* pp. 57-58, 153.

[6] Ibid., p. 62.

[7] Ibid., p. 220.

[8] Ibid., p. 151.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., pp. 145-146.

[11] Ibid., p. 87.

[12] The biblical God is personal (John 12); He *is* Holy and hates evil (Habakkuk 1:13; Proverbs 6:16); He is the Creator of the Universe (Genesis 1:1); All religions do not worship the same God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

[13] Raymond Moody, *The Light Beyond: New Explorations by the Author of Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p. 27.

[14] Robert Kastenbaum, *Is There Life After Death?* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1984), 25; citing G.A. Garfield in Kastenbaum, ed., *Between Life and Death* (New York: Spring Publishers, 1979), pp. 54-55.

[15] E.g., see Robert Gram, *An Enemy Disguised* (New York: Nelson, 1985).

